

# “Love”

The Rev. S. Shane Nanney – December 5, 2021

Luke 3:1-6

What would we have without Christmas???

- The fruit cake market would completely collapse!
- Our boring, uneventful lives would have no stress at all!
- Eggnog would just be a slimy, high cholesterol beverage.
- Santa would be a strange fat man with poor fashion sense!
- You’d have to spend your own money buying stuff that doesn’t fit.
- We would never wonder if reindeer really know how to fly.
- Your cat would never know the joy of coughing up tinsel!
- Number one reason—without Christmas, there could be no Easter!

Today, we lit the candle of Love, and while I was reflecting on the Christmas season and my message for today, the thing that kept coming back to me was the love of a parent. Specifically, God’s love for Jesus. We know that God loves Jesus because it is all throughout Scripture, we know that God loves Jesus through God’s actions in Jesus’ life, we know that God loves Jesus . . . because he is a parent. It might have seemed odd that today during Advent, our Scripture focused on Jesus’ baptism . . . but it is one of the most striking messages from God as a parent in the whole of Scripture. I particularly like the way the NIV says it, “YOU ARE MY SON, WHOM I LOVE; WITH YOU I AM WELL PLEASED.” I get that now as a parent. I understand the emotion tied up with those words. I can experience that moment in a small way as I look to my children and say, “YOU ARE MY CHILD, WHOM I LOVE; WITH YOU I AM WELL PLEASED.”

But this is not the end of the message. The most often-quoted scripture passage sheds a light on my message. John 3:16 “FOR GOD SO LOVED THE WORLD, THAT HE GAVE HIS ONLY BEGOTTEN SON, THAT WHOSOEVER BELIEVES IN HIM SHALL NOT PERISH BUT HAVE EVERLASTING LIFE.” This is what tugs at me. God loves

Jesus so much, yet he handed him over to death for you and for me. What a powerful message. Knowing how much God loves Jesus, knowing the price that was paid . . . think about what that means about God's love for you and me, how great that love is. It is one thing to say, "God loves you." It is another to see the babe in the manger, see him through a father's eyes, and know that that is the sacrifice that has been made for you . . . in love, and then say, "God loves you."

God loves you so much, he wants to give you the greatest gift he could possibly give. There is a story of a small girl and set of fake pearls:

The cheerful girl with bouncy curls was almost five. Waiting with her mother at the checkout stand, she saw a circle of glistening white pearls in a pink foil box. "Oh please, Mommy. Can I have them? Please, Mommy, please?"

Her mother checked the back of the little foil box and said, "Jenny, these pearls only cost \$1.95. If you really want them, I'll think of some extra chores for you to do and raise your allowance. It won't take long for you to save enough money to buy them yourself."

Her mother was right. After only two weeks, Jenny had enough money saved for the pearls. Her mother took her back to the store, where Jenny proudly counted out her money to the cashier.

Jenny loved her pearls. They made her feel pretty and grown up. She wore them everywhere: Sunday school, kindergarten, even to bed. The only time she took them off was when she went swimming or took a bubble bath. Her mother said that if they got wet, they might turn her neck green.

Jenny also had a very loving dad. Every night when she was ready for bed, her dad would stop whatever he was doing and come upstairs to read her a story.

One night when he finished the story, he said to Jenny, "I love you, sweetheart. Do you love me?" "Oh yes, Daddy," Jenny replied. "You know that I love you." "Then give me your pearls," her father said.

Jenny was confused. "Oh, Daddy, not my pearls," she said. "But you can have Princess, the white horse from my collection. Remember, Daddy? The one you gave me last year? She is my favorite."

“That’s okay, Honey,” Jenny’s father said. “Daddy loves you. Good night.” And he brushed her cheek with a kiss.

About a week later, after story time, Jenny’s daddy said once again, I sure do love you, sweetheart. Do you love me?”

“Daddy, you know I love you.”

“Then give me your pearls.”

Jenny was confused again. “Oh Daddy, not my pearls. But you can have my baby doll. The brand new one I got for my birthday. She is so beautiful. You can have the yellow blanket that matches her sleeper, too.”

“That’s okay,” Jenny’s father said. Daddy loves you. Good night.”

And as always, he gave her a gentle kiss.

A few nights later when her dad came in, Jenny was sitting on her bed with her legs crossed. As he came close, he noticed her chin was trembling and one silent tear rolled down her cheek.

“What is it, Jenny? What’s the matter?”

Jenny didn’t say anything but lifted her little hand up to her daddy. And when she opened it, there was her little pearl necklace. With a little quiver, she finally said, “Here, Daddy, it’s for you.”

With tears gathering in his own eyes, Jenny’s dad reached out with one hand to take the necklace. With the other hand he reached into his pocket and pulled out a blue velvet case and gave it to Jenny. When she opened it, she found a beautiful strand of real pearls.

This is what God’s love is like. The first time I heard this story, I didn’t particularly like it. I thought to myself, when I am a pastor, I can rewrite it and just have the dad give her the pearls freely, after all that is what grace is, that is how salvation really works. However, you see I have not rewritten it . . . as I have thought on it more, I think it represents more than the grace of God that is freely given, it represents all the things that get in the way of the gifts that God wants to give us.

During this advent season, I want you all to know that God loves you. I want you to know that God wants to give you of His very best. I also want to encourage you not to hold on too tightly to things. “FOR UNTO YOU IS BORN THIS DAY IN THE CITY OF DAVID, A SAVIOR WHO IS CHRIST THE LORD.” That is what we should be clinging to this season, and that’s where our hearts should be . . . fully realizing the love of a father that can’t be described . . . only experienced. Amen.